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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 8468

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 2061

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 1850

RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 2443

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 06 MUMBAI 000233

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: SIX MONTHS AFTER THE ATTACKS, NOTHING'S CHANGED IN MUMBAI

REF: 08 MUMBAI 560 AND PREVIOUS

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: On November 26, 2008, gunmen attacked Mumbai and killed 166 people during three days of violence. The Indian public and press were highly critical of the state and central government's response and the effectiveness of security forces and emergency services. After the attacks, India's Home Affairs Minister resigned, along with the Chief Minister and Home Minister of Maharashtra, and the government promised changes to better defend against another such attack. Six months later, however, interlocutors agree that the state government has made little progress on implementing the promised reforms. With national and state elections impeding major course changes for the state government, this inaction is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, the people of Mumbai do not appear motivated to take political action, as Mumbai saw a record low voter turnout in the national elections.

There continue to be opportunities for U.S. security and technology sales, but unclear procurement practices will hamper the involvement of U.S. companies. End Summary.

THE MUMBAI ATTACKS

¶2. (U) On the evening of November 26, 2008, ten well-trained gunmen from Pakistan entered Mumbai on small boats and attacked high-profile targets with automatic weapons and explosives. By the time the attack ended 62 hours later, 166 people, along with nine terrorists, had been killed and hundreds more injured. The sites that were attacked included two luxury hotels, the Taj Mahal Palace and the Oberoi-Trident, the main railway terminal, a Jewish cultural center, a cafe frequented by foreigners, a movie theater, and two hospitals. Six American citizens were killed and 20 other foreigners died. Several senior policemen were killed, including the chief of the Mumbai Anti-Terrorism squad, Hemant Karkare. One gunman was captured and is currently on trial in Mumbai. When the attacks began, the Mumbai police responded quickly, but were widely criticized for not being equipped or trained to deal with the situation, and for lacking a coherent command structure, both within the force, and with other security agencies. Moreover, the Mumbai police's response was hindered by the lack of a SWAT team or the equivalent, a notable absence in a city of more than 15 million people, forcing the city to rely on commandos based in New Delhi to

eliminate the attackers.

¶13. (U) After the attacks, the press and the general public launched vociferous attacks against the state and central governments for the lack of readiness, and lamented the poor coordination that characterized the response. Thousands of candle-bearing mourners marched near the Taj Hotel to protest the attacks and demand improved security. Around the city, billboards and signs mocked the use of commandos for VIP guard duties and openly attacked the performance of the police. Some of the criticism was constructive and detailed: for example, a citizen's group called Bombay First published a lengthy report on how to improve crisis management in Mumbai. The report's recommendations focused on improving the command and control systems of the police and emergency response units, upgrading police equipment and training, communicating more effectively and coherently with the public through the media, and raising public awareness about security.

¶14. (U) Maharashtra's Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh, and Home Minister, R.R. Patil, resigned in the aftermath of the attacks. In New Delhi, Home Affairs Minister Shivraj Patil resigned after taking "moral responsibility" for the situation. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh apologized to the Indian people for being unable to prevent the attacks, and promised to improve India's domestic security. New Home Affairs Minister P. Chidambaram announced reforms including a new national investigative agency, a new Coastal Command, 20 new counterterrorism schools, and new regional NSG commando bases. Maharashtra's new Chief Minister, Ashok Chavan, declared that security was the government's "top priority."

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CONDITION OF POLICE AND REFORM PLANS

¶15. (SBU) Last week marked the six month anniversary of the Mumbai attacks, and local media and observers used the occasion to evaluate whether the state and central governments have implemented their promises to upgrade the safety and security infrastructure of Mumbai. The media highlighted serious problems with the Indian police, which coincides with the larger problem of weak governance and corruption at all levels of government. Overall, India is heavily under-policed, with a police to population ratio of 1:694. This is well below the UN recommended ratio of 1:400. (Note: For comparison, Mexico's ratio is 1:492 and Saudi Arabia's is 1:387. End Note.) Looking specifically at Maharashtra, a credible media source reported that spending on police modernization in the state drastically decreased, from \$42 million in 2001 to \$19 million in 2008. The state government has not yet appointed a head for the Mumbai Anti-Terror Squad to replace its fallen chief. Over the last year, the state High Court invalidated the appointment of the head of the state police, forcing the state to appoint a new head who, due to retirement rules, will have only a six month term. Moreover, during this time, a strict pre-election code of conduct - which limits any major policy changes or procurements -- was in place in the two months before the April-May national elections. There will be similar restrictions in the two months before the Maharashtra state elections scheduled for September ¶2009.

¶16. (SBU) Despite these reports, Prem Krishan Jain, Principal Home Secretary for Maharashtra State, presented an optimistic view of the police force. He said Maharashtra added 33,000 police officers in the last three years. Jain described

ambitious plans to arm more policemen, many of whom carry only lathis (cudgels). Currently, 33 percent of police have firearms; the state plans large purchases so that 60 percent of police will have at least a revolver by 2011, he said. (Note: Congenoffs confirmed that the Maharashtra police placed an order for 1,000 Smith and Wesson 9mm pistols in April 2009. End Note.) However, Jain said police armed with revolvers would not have been able to stop terrorists with assault rifles and grenades. (Comment: While this argument has some merit, it should be noted that the one terrorist captured alive was taken after his companion was killed at a checkpoint by police armed with revolvers. This illustrates that even revolvers can help police incapacitate or kill well-armed attackers, if luck is on their side. End comment.) Jain acknowledged the media reports about procurement, but said that states were given wide latitude to make specific purchases and there were no major obstacles. According to Jain, the greatest needs are for better bomb-detection and disposal equipment, as well as bullet-proof vests capable of stopping AK-47 rounds.

¶7. (SBU) By contrast, non-governmental sources painted a much more negative view of the police force, describing serious shortcomings in equipment, training, and command structure. Sources said plans for better weapons, equipment, and training remain mostly on paper. Chittkala Zutshi, the former Home Secretary who was trapped in the Taj Hotel during the first of the attacks, said a Quick Response Team was formed after 9/11, but was not functional at the time of the attacks, and played no role in relieving the hotels. V. Balachandran, a retired senior policeman and intelligence official who is heading an official inquiry into the attacks for the state government, also noted that the Quick Response Team had been neglected and was not in a position to respond to the attacks; for instance, the unit hadn't had any target practice since August 2007 due to lack of ammunition, he claimed. This highlights the need for proper training and follow-through to maintain operational effectiveness, not just setting up commando units on paper, he argued. Zutshi and Balachandran shared concern over purchasing problems, noting that buying weapons and equipment was very cumbersome because of an October to March purchasing cycle. Balachandran pointed out that if the state Home department fails to spend the money by March, the funds revert back to the

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central government. His report will recommend a two-year buying cycle and giving state police forces the ability to make their own purchases without permission from the center. Zutshi said the timely purchase of equipment was also hindered by corruption in the bureaucracy.

¶8. (SBU) Mr. Vikram Mahurkar, CEO of the security company Checkmate, which has provided private guard services in Maharashtra for 20 years, said the Mumbai police have gotten much worse during that time. The police are demoralized, with extremely low pay, lack of equipment and training, bad housing, and poor working conditions. In the last 20 years, they have been given more duties with fewer resources. He was on site at the Taj Hotel on the night of the attacks and noted that there was no clear command structure. In a separate conservation, Satish Sahney, the former Mumbai Police Commissioner, agreed that the command structure was completely ineffective due to political interference in the police force. Sahney said not much has changed since attacks, although there are some plans for better training and equipment. He said the Indian police need a complete overhaul, starting with recruitment. Balachandran said that his report will emphasize the need for better command and control during crises. (Note: For example, the Taj Hotel Security Director told Conoff that the police in a station near the first attack at Leopold's Cafe were unable to access their weapons for several hours because the officer with the key to unlock the storage cabinets was visiting relatives outside the city. End Note.)

¶9. (SBU) Raghu Raman, CEO of the Mahindra Special Services Group, said the central government gave the Maharashtra police \$75 million after the attacks, but it wasn't clear what happened to the money. The police made some improvements to their reactive capabilities by buying new vehicles, but did nothing to increase their preventative capabilities, such as improving intelligence. Raman, a former army officer with experience fighting terrorists in Kashmir, said the police were "not so much outgunned as out-trained" by the terrorists. He said the Mumbai police used to be among the best in India, but have deteriorated. The police are highly politicized and operate in an atmosphere of corruption and organized crime, made worse by smuggling since Mumbai is a port city. He noted the connection between corruption and the opportunities for terrorists to operate. Former Commissioner Sahney highlighted the same issue: he claimed that organized crime is linked to terrorists in Mumbai.

FORCE ONE / NSG COMMANDOS

¶10. (SBU) Local army units and Marine commandos were on the scene of the attacks within five hours, but were pulled out without being used. Units of the central government's National Security Guard (NSG) commandos took more than ten hours to reach the scene from New Delhi because of difficulties in procuring an airplane, despite the fact that a plane was supposed to be on standby at all times. Recognizing the need for some kind of rapid reaction force, the Maharashtra government announced plans to establish a new state-level commando unit, called Force One. Force One has begun training in nearby Pune with the goal of being stationed in Mumbai for rapid reaction to crises, but is not yet ready for action. In May, the Indian Express reported that 100 out of 350 recruits, who are taken from the regular police force, had washed out due to the strenuous training. This might indicate that Force One will be well-trained and effective, but it does not bode well for the unit being ready in the near future.

¶11. (SBU) According to Balachandran, his report will state that NSG commandos took far too long to arrive at the site of the attacks; as a consequence, the report recommends that such units should be in every major city. Jain said Force One commandos will start the next phase of training in Pune in June, but the

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location of the Mumbai base has not yet been determined. Recruitment of physically fit men for the unit has not been a problem, per Jain. The Maharashtrian government has also not agreed on a local base for the NSG commandos. Balachandran said young police officers should be taken into commando units, rather than regular police who were more interested in "earning" extra money (bribes) from normal police work in the city. Elements of Force One should be placed at two or three different locations throughout Mumbai, he recommended, because it can take several hours to reach different parts of the city from any single location. Zutshi, however, said there would only be one base for Force One.

INTELLIGENCE

¶12. (SBU) On the issue of intelligence, Home Secretary Jain said the newly-established National Investigation Agency (NIA) will improve sharing of intelligence among state police forces.

He noted that there had been resistance in the past to a central agency because policing is a state responsibility, but now that it has been established it is moving forward. Rakesh Maria, Joint Police Commissioner for Crime in Mumbai and the lead investigator for the attacks, told Congenoffs that there has been better intelligence sharing between the states and between individual states and the center since 26/11. Balachandran's report will find that police had no specific advanced intelligence information about the attacks, although they did have some general intelligence in August and September 2009 about an impending attack, which they expected to be a bombing (fitting with the recent string of bombings across India). The report will recommend better sharing of intelligence at all levels of police and security forces, including the use of open-source intelligence to trace patterns of terrorist activity.

¶13. (SBU) Former Commissioner Sahney characterized the establishment of the NIA as a mistake, since India already has a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The government should have strengthened the CBI's intelligence capabilities rather than starting a new agency, because it will take five years to set up the new agency and make it effective. Sahney said intelligence was the key to fighting terrorism, with a particular need to know if there is local support. The police force in Maharashtra is only 3-4 percent Muslim, which hampers the police's ability to develop intelligence information about possible cooperation with terrorists within the local Muslim community. The police are not the agency best placed to deal with terrorism because their training and focus doesn't give them "the right reflexes." There should be a specially-designed agency of non-uniformed anti-terror specialists, whose only job is to cultivate intelligence contacts, he argued. While intelligence bureaus share information, actions suffer due to poor follow-up. The Mumbai police must react to daily developments, such as strikes, unrest, or festivals, and aren't prepared for more focused policing.

COASTAL PATROL

¶14. (SBU) Since the attacks, the central government has confirmed that the navy will be responsible for coastal protection, Jain said, with assistance from the police and coast guard. Balachandran's report will find that coastal patrol was ineffective before the attacks due to confused and overlapping responsibilities, allowing the terrorists to enter from the sea undetected. Sahney said the coast guard and navy have not explained the failures that allowed the terrorists to enter, or whether these agencies had seen the intelligence about a potential landing from the sea. Several interlocutors claimed that smugglers commonly bribe the coast guard to be able to land in Mumbai and the surrounding coast; Raman said that local fisherman commonly encounter smuggling boats with gunmen in the seas off Mumbai, and would not have raised an alarm to authorities. Authorities curbed pleasure boating off the coast

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for a time, but with little impact. (Comment: A Times of India article on May 26, 2009, said the state had so far failed to acquire speedboats to patrol the coast, and that local police patrols were still taking place in fishing trawlers).

IS CHANGE AND REFORM POSSIBLE?

¶15. (SBU) Local sources agreed that the Maharashtra government was not strongly committed to pushing through effective reform of the police and emergency response forces. Regarding his

forthcoming report, Balachandran said he hopes the state government will follow the recommendations, but the perennial problem in India is that "people forget about the past too quickly." According to Mahurkar, there is a widespread feeling that it will take Maharashtra a long time to change. His company anticipates problems whenever they have to work with the Maharashtra government, particularly over the issue of licenses for armed guards. States like Gujarat, Delhi, and Punjab are much easier to deal with, he said.

¶16. (SBU) Mahindra's Raman believed it would take another attack for real change to occur. He said the Maharashtra government was focused on the just-concluded national elections, leading to little progress on security issues. Now that the elections are over with the Congress Party returned to power, there will be at least continuity in government at the center. However, Maharashtra suffers from weak leadership and Mumbai is neglected because it is possible to win power in the state while ignoring Mumbai and the industrial belt due to the electoral weight of rural voters. Mumbai is simply a cash cow for the state and for India, he said. Sahney said there was a feeling that little had changed at the ground level. The police force needs continuity to gain expertise and experience. However, police leaders are selected purely by seniority, and short-term chiefs often serve for just a few months because it's "their turn" before retirement. The central government has been preoccupied with the Indo-American civilian nuclear agreement, and has neglected security issues such as the Naxalite insurgency. He hoped the central government would take a stronger line on security now that the Left parties are marginalized after the elections.

PUBLIC PRESSURE FOR CHANGE?

¶17. (SBU) According to Raman, the average Mumbaikar's life is so full of difficulties that three days of terrorist attacks were not markedly worse than the other 362 days of the year. He pointed out that despite all the outrage after the attacks, there was a record low turnout in Mumbai for the just-concluded national elections. (Note: Turnout in Mumbai was 41% in 2009, compared to 47% in 2004; the national turnout rate in 2009 was 57%. Some point to the holiday weekend timing of the Mumbai polls as a second reason for low turnout. End Note.) Raman said the local and international business community has to demand better security for all of India before real change will happen. S.N. Desai, National Coordinator of the right-of-the-center Forum for Integrated National Security, said his group is hoping to raise awareness among the general public about security. They have reached out to college and university students, and are advocating that the National Cadet Corps (similar to ROTC but not necessarily leading to military commissions) be re-established at every college and university.

REAL CHANGE ELUSIVE

¶18. (SBU) Comment: By all accounts, the security situation has not improved in the six months since the Mumbai attacks. Plans exist on paper, but an unfocused bureaucracy and the lack of

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political will to push through reforms have stymied progress. With a "caretaker" state Chief Minister, and successive rounds of national and state elections, interlocutors don't expect any improvements until at least next year. The public outrage against the government's failings has faded, as evidenced by the low voter turnout in Mumbai, and, so far, the absence of the

attacks as an election issue. One thing is for certain: the state and central governments have a lot of history and inertia to overcome if they are to make any real progress in protecting Mumbai against future attacks. End Comment.

KAUFFMAN